



## **Personal, Popular and Information Portals**

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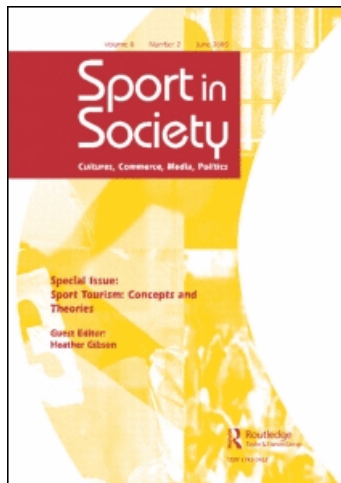
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### Personal, popular and information portals - Olympic news and the use of mobile phones among migrant workers in Fuzhou

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## **Personal, popular and information portals – Olympic news and the use of mobile phones among migrant workers in Fuzhou<sup>1</sup>**

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Based on theory regarding mobile communication in general, this essay relates the experiences of migrant workers from both rural and urban areas in Fuzhou, who used mobile phones to stay in contact with the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, to how these contacts supported and encouraged migrant workers to persist in gathering Olympic Games information. In other words, does the relationship between demographics and knowledge about the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games differ according to the use of mobile phones among migrant workers? Results indicate that television became the primary source of Olympic Games news for migrant workers, but actually with few advantages as the respondents considered the mobile phone as their second source of information. Given the higher than average mobile media penetration rate among the sample of migrant workers and their information expectations, we cannot ignore the mobile phone's impact as a channel for information and public services. This essay's focus is also on how the government, the official press and service providers (China Mobile and China Unicom) appreciated the mobile phone as a means of spreading the Olympic Games' influence, making it possible for a large majority of people to enjoy the Olympic Games, and popularizing knowledge.

### **Introduction**

Changes in technology have driven the development of new communication media. McLuhan's phrase 'The medium is the message'<sup>2</sup> encapsulates the fact that the form of a medium embeds itself in the message, creating a symbiotic relationship by which the medium influences how the message is perceived over time. Different media invite different degrees of participation on the part of a person who chooses to consume that medium. But the fast spread of new information technology often means that we fail to notice the structural changes in our affairs. Access to new technology also leads to a series of questions about what kind of information is available, whether information promotes an increase in real knowledge, and, perhaps most importantly, how are the relations of power in a society affected by the growth of information and communication technologies (ICTs)?<sup>3</sup>

In this age of mass media, it is certain that information will become more important in the future, as we move into an increasingly technology-dominant era. But it must be recognized that an information gap does exist and has been broadening since the advent of the Internet. This is mainly because the diffusion of the Internet across different areas is quite uneven, a process known as the 'Digital Divide'.<sup>4</sup> This divide exists between under-developed and developed countries as well as among people in the same country.

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According to the 22nd Survey Report on the Internet Development in China,<sup>5</sup> the Internet penetration rate in China, 19.1%, is slightly lower than the average Internet penetration rate in the rest of the developed world, 21.1%. Currently most Chinese people still face technical difficulties when it comes to digital acquisition, processing, access, delivery and preservation as they adopt the virtual world, although the number of netizens in China had leaped to the first place in the world by the end of June, 2008.

### *The mobile phone in China*

In contrast to the USA where Internet communication dominates,<sup>6</sup> another technology is being promoted particularly by Chinese consumers: cell or mobile phones which are labelled 'handy' in Chinese – a vivid expression for an increasingly personal approach to communication. Digital technology has expanded the mobile phone's potential from a talking device to a more dynamic tool, shaping individual and organizational life, doing new things one had previous not even thought of doing.<sup>7</sup> After 20 years' development in China, the total number of mobile phone users had surpassed 592 million by the end of July 2008, an average of one in less than three people (see Figure 1).<sup>8</sup> The figure illustrates at least the quantitative relevance of this new communication media in China.

On the other hand, mobile phone use is largely unregulated, unpredictable and unknowable. It is impossible to know when they will be used, what will be said, by whom, to whom, or for what purpose. The mobile phone can't be easily switched off, controlled, or made safe by centralized supervisory authorities.<sup>9</sup> It breaches information blockage and challenges the traditional communication order, helping people to receive information about the outside world, to maintain contact with each other and even make political waves. As low-cost, higher credibility phones gain popularity, there are now new competing models of citizen journalism, with more outlets delivering news.

Furthermore, the mobile phone is depicted not only as an opportunity to send and receive personal-interest messages, but also as a new medium for information retrieval.<sup>10</sup> To sate the Chinese thirst for cheap prices, fast connections and global information, China has become the biggest mobile communication carrier in the world, both in terms of customer base and network scale since 2007. The mobile phone as a medium affords

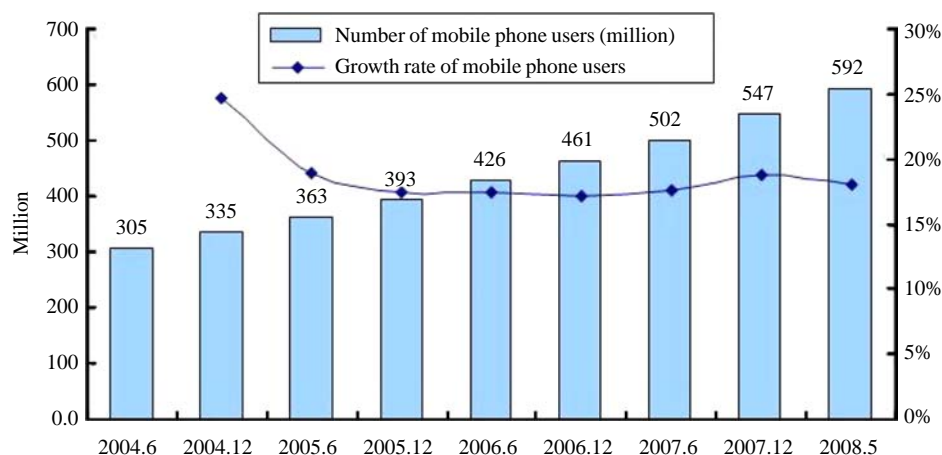


Figure 1. Valid mobile phone users' growth in China: 2004–08.  
Source: CNNIC.

a useful model to understand how the media and ordinary people in China interact. Based on a theoretical outline of mobile communication in general, this essay discusses the specific role of mobile communication during the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games using the example of Chinese migrant workers. The intent of this essay is to analyse some of the effects of mobile media on Olympic Games knowledge among migrant workers in both rural and urban areas in Fuzhou, the capital city of southeast China's Fujian Province. It also discusses some implications for using mobile telephony in order to provide both possible connections within society and necessary information for migrant workers, in addition to taking part in and contributing to any aspect of knowledge spreading and citizenship development in China.

### *The Beijing 2008 Olympic Games and mobile phones*

The Beijing 2008 Games is the first time that digital media coverage of the event – including live broadband Internet coverage and mobile phone clips – was widely available throughout the world from official rights holders' websites. Mobile phones were the high-speed wireless connection service that allowed for a personal approach to get Olympic information; also they became the most important new carrier to spread news in the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.<sup>11</sup> Both the third-generation (3G) mobile phone, based on the Chinese 3G standard, known as TD-SCDMA (Time Division Synchronous Code Division Multiple Access), and cell phones with common functions such as messaging, Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) and Internet access also were able to act as media to receive the Olympic news. With these applications, work staff, volunteers and ordinary people could enjoy high-speed data transmissions, which allowed them to watch televised games, receive mobile newspapers, and surf the Internet on their cell phones. China Mobile, the sole cooperative partner for the Beijing Olympics of mobile communications services, provided promotional events for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games information service. It cost only RMB 0.4 Yuan each hour to watch the Olympic Games via cell phone, while the official mobile phone broadcaster of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games had the ability to support 10,000 subscribers for real-time video transmission and 10,000 users for video-on-demand at the same time.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the cheap cost of receiving the Olympic news, we should not omit to note that over 46% of the audience got their Olympic news from the Internet and Wireless Internet via cell phones, while more young white-collar workers, according to a survey from Iimedia Research, preferred to use mobile phones to catch up with the latest news about the Olympic Games, especially when they were on their way to work or the restroom, or before they went to bed.<sup>13</sup> In China, over the 17 days of the Olympic Games, 153 million people watched the live broadcasts of the Olympic Games online, with an average 20 million page views per day on the mobile phone platform provided by CCTV.com.<sup>14</sup> As a result, in spreading information about the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, the use of mobile phones to get the Olympic news emerges as a very striking communication technique.

### *Migrant workers and their use of media*

Although the term *migrant worker* has different official meanings and connotations in different parts of the world, it is used currently for residents from China's less-developed areas who go to work in more prosperous coastal areas and big cities.<sup>15</sup> According to statistics from *Study Times* (學習時報), an official newspaper of the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the current number of migrant

workers in China is estimated at 200 million, or nearly 15.4% of the population.<sup>16</sup> One of important characteristics Chinese migrant workers have, according to state statistics,<sup>17</sup> is that they are fleeting transients in cities easily attracted by a high-income, better work opportunities and living conditions in urban areas. Recent estimates put the number of migrant workers migrating to urban areas (urban working population) to over 140 million, with the growth rate of 6 to 8 million each year.<sup>18</sup> And the total number of working population in urban areas has already surpassed that in rural areas. When placed in a new social context such as the urban environment, however, migrant workers are always faced with concomitant physical, emotional and intellectual demands.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, city governments cannot offer enough housing, education and other environmental infrastructures to temporary residents. Most migrant workers do not enjoy the same basic rights as ordinary urban citizens, nor are their family members allowed to live in cities, unless they are able to find urban jobs as well. As a result, ways of information seeking have become an important tool used by migrant workers to search for jobs, find better work opportunities or seek health information. As the country tries to bridge the widening income and literate gap, according to Professor Ge Jianxiong,<sup>20</sup> fair competition and information seeking for migrant workers is on the top of the government agenda. Media literacy, or the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create messages in a wide variety of media for finding useful information, is an important component of individual information seeking ability.

It is interesting to note that the mobile phone penetration rate among migrant workers, according to the survey from China Youth and Children Research Center, is 72.9%, much higher than the average mobile phone penetration rate in China, 45.5%.<sup>21</sup> A study by Renmin University of China also reveals that the mobile phone penetration rate among left-behind children, 7.8%, has lagged *far behind* the average mobile phone penetration rate among migrant children, 38.2%.<sup>22</sup>

### Research question

Based on the above brief overview, this study will now consider the questions relevant to knowledge of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games and the mobile phone use of migrant workers between rural and urban areas in Fuzhou, the capital city of southeast China's Fujian Province, as of June 2008 to September 2008. With over 40% of farmers seeking jobs outside their local areas, Fujian Province also has attracted migrant workers from all over China after the strategy of building-up the Economic Zone on the West Side of the Straits was announced, calling for more workforces from rural areas. Taking No.1 Centre Elementary School of Gulou District, Fuzhou as an example, the population of children of migrant workers, 1,080, soared to 72% of total students there.<sup>23</sup>

The study reported here focuses on the key research question: How does the relationship between demographics and knowledge about the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games issues differ according to the use of mobile phones among migrant workers?

The study focuses on the following characteristics of migrant workers, among others: 1) demographics; 2) orientation toward the mobile phone as an information source; 3) community involvement and attachment; 4) social contact; and 5) communication with news sources. Also I will focus on the role of the mobile phone in producing transformations in values and personality. Changes in values and attitudes, it can be argued, are far more important to modernity than mere changes in behaviour. The focus is also on how the government and the official press appreciate mobile media as a means of broadcasting official information, such as calling for participation in the Olympic torch

relay; the popularizing of knowledge in the future; and for experiencing an increase in the awareness of participation in public affairs. Focusing on data collection, fieldwork and survey, and population selection based on their relevant surrounding mobile communications, I shall also provide further recommendations on how to harvest the potential of mobile communication among migrant workers.

### Perspectives and relevance

Acting as a complex sparkplug for human life, the mobile phone enables people to create their own micro-cultures, change cultural norms and values, and demonstrates consumers' ability to modify and repurpose technology for their own use.<sup>24</sup> Critical studies argue that mobility does not inevitably oppose centralized power; mobility can reinforce central hierarchical imperial power, or have the ability to disrupt the structure of social interaction at several levels, and even can frustrate users' attempts to communicate.<sup>25</sup>

Some studies have focused exclusively on the mobile phone's development in China. Looking into the hierarchy of relative influences on the intention to adopt a mobile phone, Louis Leung and Ran Wei sampled Hong Kong and suggest that the effects of age and social differences far outweigh those of the technological differences.<sup>26</sup> Tao Jianjie once investigated media access,<sup>27</sup> both traditional ones and mobile phones, for migrant workers in Shanghai's Xuhui District. Field observation and interviews on the spread and use of mobile phones among migrant workers were conducted by Yang Shanhua and Zhu Weizhi in South China's Pearl River Delta,<sup>28</sup> although it only captured an early stage of such a spread mostly from the motivation of mobile communication use. The *China Youth Daily* published the above mentioned study on *Media Literacy between the Left-behind Children and the Migrant Children in Cities* which made public the fact that the mobile phone penetration rate among the left-behind children at 7.8%<sup>29</sup> has lagged *far behind* the average mobile phone penetration rate in the migrant children, 38.2%.

### Literature evaluation

Most Chinese studies have emphasized the influence of mobile phones during the SARS epidemic.<sup>30</sup> The mobile phone has been used to mobilize supporters of political causes while the government has made concerted attempts to not only to register SIM cards and identity cards, but also to block these messages at source. There are specificities to mobile adoption as well as the urban and information ecologies of China that make it something of an outlier case, at least in comparison to Asian countries such as Japan and Korea. Discussions only recently have begun to revolve around exterior features, such as SMS, although they have lacked in-depth arguments or comprehensive investigation of the sociological impacts. Little attention was paid to a less unequally distributed technology, such as the ubiquitous mobile phone and its media reliance and media preference within migrant workers. The spread of the Olympic Games influence on migrant workers had not attracted any attention in previous studies.

### Method

#### Survey research

A two-step approach was adopted for the empirical research. Firstly, the study aimed to find out the existence of differences in adoption, acquisition and usage of mobile phones



among migrant workers. I differentiate between those people in the rural and urban areas because they represent one of the largest mobile phone user groups and are easily influenced by mobile phones in China, trying to find out how and why their patterns of mobile phone usage vary.<sup>31</sup> Random interviewees were chosen among the sample population of migrant workers in urban and rural areas in Fuzhou, in representative factories and shopping malls, spanning both the metropolitan areas and the surrounding, less industrialized, belt. Local official statistics departments, the CNNIC's annual report, data from Fujian Branch of China Mobile and China Unicom companies provide demographic information.

The second step was to design a questionnaire for face-to-face interview, after preliminarily drafting the demographic data about the relationship between the mobile media use and attitudes toward communication preferences and knowledge on the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

The graphs included:

- Basic data: age, gender, education, career, socio-economic status, usage time, browse content and preference;
- Attitude data: attitude and knowledge towards the Olympic Games and usage time with mobile phone;
- Behaviour data: improved understanding of media using performance. More importantly, it can be used to segment customers based on behaviour, thus to define criteria for different categories of mobile media owners.

### *Ethnographic research*

We obtained detailed information about migrant workers using mobile phones in natural settings like factories, companies, as well as on the street from personal observation with in-depth exploration and interviews over extended periods of time. My research group also joined factories and communities as participant observers to examine and assemble a picture of how the migrant workers used mobile media to explore their own identities and to create new ones. In particular, I summarized the raw data to understand the information demands of mobile phone users from low-income and migrant workers. An open-ended questionnaire was introduced. Interviewees were able to talk freely within these questions, encouraging a full, meaningful answer using the subject's own knowledge and/or feelings.

### **Progress plan**

#### *Sample procedure*

At first we selected companies which had over 50% migrant workers amongst their total worker population from both rural and urban areas in Fuzhou, then sent out our requests and sample questionnaires at the beginning of May 2008. After receiving permission,<sup>32</sup> we went to the companies to popularize the questionnaire knowledge and dispel any misgivings among migrant workers. The survey data collection procedure used a random sampling protocol, and followed voluntary principles, to produce a statistically representative sample of the migrant workers' population in companies we interviewed. We started to obtain detailed information about migrant workers using mobile phones in natural settings like factories, companies, as well as on the rural streets from personal observation with in-depth explorations and interviews over extended periods of time at the end of May. The research



group joined communities once a week as participant observers to examine and assemble a picture of how these sample migrant workers used mobile phones. Two days after the Beijing Olympic Games started (10 August), we began an open-ended questionnaire on the information about the Olympic Games and mobile phone use, then left the questionnaires with interviewees during the Olympics. The questionnaires were sent back by the sampled migrant workers from 25 August. We finished the data collection on 5 September 2008.

*Demographic data*

The number of sampled migrant workers in this study is 111. The proportion of females among the sample is 29%, while males take up 63% of the total sample. The remaining 8% did not provide their gender information in the questionnaires. The majority of the sample are young people of 26 to 30, which accounts for 25% of migrant workers interviewed, reaching one quarter of the total amount of people; the next groups include people aged 31–35 and 21–25, which account for 17% and 16% respectively, then, people aged 36–40 and 41–45, both of which account for 12%. The young age structure of migrant workers has exerted great influence on the in-depth application of the mobile phones in the sample, for example, in the use of the online function.

The proportion of migrant workers regarding the mobile phone and television as their most frequently used media is the largest, both accounting for 27% (see Table 1). But most of migrant workers in urban areas did not have televisions in their dormitories.

The proportion of migrant workers with mobile phones in both urban and rural areas is very large, both accounting for over 90% (see Table 2), which reflects the popularization of mobile phones.

**Findings and discussion**

The data below is summarized from the questionnaire survey conducted from June to August 2008, designed and administrated by the author. The survey data collection procedure followed random sampling protocol to produce a statistically representative sample of the migrant workers population in companies we interviewed.

*Comparison of results between the rural and urban surveys*

Table 1 lays out the relationship between the use of mobile phone and workplaces in rural and urban areas. Both the rural interviews and the urban survey show that migrant workers in both samples consider the mobile phone as one of the most important ways to get up-to-date information and frequently used the medium. But the chi-square test shows that the

Table 1. Most frequently used media among sample migrant workers.

Media	Percentage
Mobile phone	27
Television	27
Internet	22
Newspaper	12
Friends, colleagues, family members	8
Radio	3
Magazine	1

Table 2. Mobile phone ownership among sample migrant workers

Urban (65 respondents)	Rural (45 respondents)	Missing (1 respondent)
91.7%	95.6%	100%

differences (the relationship of mobile phone use in the past workplace to the present workplace) are not significant (see Table 3, no.1).

The chi-square test shows that the differences between the present use of mobile phone and the workplace are significant ( $P = 0.002 < 0.05$ , see Table 1, no.2). The present workplace has a certain influence on use of the mobile phones.

### *Comparison of results between the workplace and the Olympic news*

Two of our hypothesis propose the existence of differences in the present workplace and when and which channel was used to get the latest Olympic news. The chi-square test shows that the differences are not significant (see Table 1, no.3 and 1, no.4)

Regarding the existence of differences in the present workplace and the favorite media sources to get Olympic Games news in the future, the differences are statistically

Table 3. Comparison of results between rural and urban survey (\*\*t significant at  $p < .01$ )

	Pearson Chi-Square Asymp. Sig.(2-sided)	Lambda
1. Self-assessed level of mobile phone use before	0.361	
2. Self-assessed level of present use of mobile phone and workplace	0.002**	0.235
3. The existence of differences of time for getting the latest Olympic news in present workplaces	0.457	
4. The existence of differences amongst channels for getting the latest Olympic news in present workplaces	0.145	
5. The existence of present workplaces for the favourite media sources to get Olympic news in the future	0.000**	0.067
4. The existence of differences in present workplace and suggestions for media channel for migrant workers groups to get Olympic Games news in the future	0.006**	0.226
6. The most frequently used media and when did you get the latest news about Beijing Olympic Games	0.498	
7. The most frequently used media and the favourite media sources to get Olympic Games news in the future	0.580	
8. The most frequent used media and which channel did informants use to get the latest Olympic news	0.000**	0.122
9. The most frequently used media and suggestions about media channels for migrant workers groups to get Olympic news in the future	0.000**	0.126
10. The frequency of mobile phone use and when informants got the latest Olympic news	0.146	
11. The frequency of mobile phone use and which channel informants got the latest Olympic news from	0.098	
12. The frequency of mobile phone use and the favourite media sources to get the Olympic news in the future	0.058	
13. The frequency of mobile phone use and suggestions about media channel for migrant workers groups to get Olympic news in the future	0.000**	0.052

significant at the 95% level ( $P = 0.000 < 0.05$ , see Table 6.1–5). It indicates that both the rural and urban workplaces have had an impact on the sampled migrant workers' decision on which are their favourite media sources they would prefer to use to obtain Olympic news in the future. However, the influence is little due to the extremely low correlation ( $\text{Lambda} = 0.067$ , see Table 1, no.5).

Also regarding the existence of differences in the present workplace and the suggestion on media channels for migrant workers groups to get the Olympic news in the future, the differences are statistically significant at the 95% level ( $P = 0.006 < 0.05$ ,  $\text{Lambda} = 0.226$ , see Table 1, no.6). It indicates that both the rural and urban workplaces have an impact on the sample migrant workers to decide by themselves which media approach will be best for them to receive the Olympic news in the future.

### ***Comparison of results between the most frequently used media and the Beijing Olympic Games***

Two of our hypotheses were about the most frequently used media and when did informants get the latest Beijing Olympic Games news and their favourite media sources to get Olympic news in the future. The chi-square test shows that the differences are not significant (see Table 1, no.7 and no.8)

Regarding the most frequently used media and which channel was employed by informants to get the latest news about the Beijing Olympic Games and their suggestions on media channels for migrant workers groups to use to get the Olympic news in the future, the differences are statistically significant at the 95% level ( $P = 0.000 < 0.05$ ,  $\text{Lambda} = 0.122$ , see Table 1, no.9;  $P = 0.000 < 0.05$ ,  $\text{Lambda} = 0.126$ , see Table 1, no.10). It indicated that the most frequently used media has an impact on the sample migrant workers to decide by themselves which media approach would be best for migrant workers to receive the news about Olympic Games in the future, as well as where they got the latest Olympic Games news.

### ***Comparison of results between the use of mobile phones and the news on Beijing Olympic Games***

Regarding the frequency of mobile phone use and when and which channel informants used to get the latest news about the Beijing Olympic Games and the favourite media sources to get Olympic news in the future, the chi-square test shows that the differences are not significant (see Table 1, no.11, no.12 and no.13)

Regarding the frequency of mobile phone use and suggestions about media channel for migrant workers groups to get the Olympic Games news in the future, the differences are statistically significant at the 95% level ( $P = 0.006 < 0.05$ , see Table 1, no.14). It indicates that the frequency of mobile phone use now has an impact on the sampled migrant workers to decide by themselves which media approach will be best for migrant workers to receive the new of Olympic Games in the future. However, the influence is small due to the extremely low correlation ( $\text{Lambda} = 0.052$ , see Table 1, no.14).

### ***Comparison of results on the workplaces, the use of media and the frequency of mobile phone use***

The present workplace has an influence on the use of the mobile phone. The existence of differences in present workplaces (rural or urban areas) had the biggest impact on the

sample migrant workers' decisions about which media approach will be best for migrant workers to use in order to get the Olympic news in the future. The most frequently used media also indicates its impact on both the media channels about the latest new and future information on the Olympic Games.

The frequency of mobile media use, as well as the existence of differences in the present workplace (rural or urban areas) influences the sample migrant workers to decide which media approach would be best for migrant workers to receive Olympic news in the future. But both influences are statistically insignificant.

### *Comparison of the results on media use, media preference and audience expectations on Olympic Games news in urban areas*

As shown in Table 4, TV is the primary source of Olympic Games news for all three groups (the media use, media preference and audience expectations), but actually not significantly more as the respondents considered mobile phones and the Internet as their second and third sources, due to the lack of television sets in the dormitories of migrant workers according to our interviews.

### *Examples from the field*

Migrant workers seemed to experience a bit of anxiety at the time of their first interview. It seemed to be particularly challenging because this interview also contained a presentation component with personal information. Over the period of two months of pre-field research, April and May, the author used text messaging to encourage and support the migrant workers who had completed their first interviews. Often all that was required was a short text message to the migrant workers, telling them that what they had provided would improve the understanding of media use among migrant workers. The information also gives advice to organizations, such as those working on the protection of migrant workers' rights, to collect migrant workers' complaint data via new media.

### *Zhang Qixun (張其訓)*

The father of an 8-year-old girl, phoned his left-behind daughter in his hometown Longyan, a prefecture-level city in south-eastern Fujian province, twice a week on average. By being able to stay in touch via SMS, Zhang and his daughter were able to have a talk usually to provide the support and encouragement that his daughter needed to complete course assignments and to keep track of the course requirements, while performing an important family connection. Zhang had learned about multimedia messaging and mobile on-line

Table 4. Comparison of results on media use, media preference and audience expectations on the Olympic news in urban areas.

Media	Media Use	Media preference	Audience Expectations
Mobile phone	23.1%	16.9%	4.6%
Television	30.8%	44.6	83.4%
Internet	21.5%	21.5%	0%
Radio	1.5%	3.1%	3.1%
Newspaper	13.8 %	7.7%	3.1%
Others	9.3%	6.2%	5.8%

functions from his employers but never used that. He thought it was 'useless and a waste of money' for him and the migrant workers.

He took out his mobile phone and showed me a text message when I asked him which Olympic event holds most interest for you? This message came from his daughter telling him that He Wenna, who also came from Longyan, just had won the first Olympic trampoline gold on 18 August 2008. Zhang remembered that he shared the news immediately with his colleagues while he also forwarded the message to his fellow-villagers as he was an opinion leader.

#### *Wen He (文和)*

A 22-year-old graduate from the senior middle school who was working as a home delivery staff member. He was one of the migrant workers who was familiar with accessing the Internet via mobile phones. Wen's mobile online duration was over five hours every week, the longest one in our survey. Funds, the stock market and news became the main topics when he surfed the Internet with his mobile phone. Wen He received the news that Michael Phelps and the US team squeaked in to win the 4x100m freestyle relay on 11 August 2008 from the mobile phone three days before our interview.

Wen had already changed his mobile phone number three times. But he never changed his mobile phone, saying it was 'unnecessary'. He once sent a text message expressing his concern at the latest pricing package from China Mobile, since he appreciated the service provider's promotion programmes, saying: 'I always pay attention to the promotion programs by China Mobile. I prefer to switch to a new number to top up my mobile as soon as I know there are some promotion programs.'

Such a trend, according to Luo Guoquan, director of the news centre, Fujian Branch China Unicom Corporation Limited,<sup>33</sup> was supported by the implementation of the zero-monthly-fee cards that allowed mobile phone use without a basic monthly rate. Moreover, calls can still be received when the card runs out of credit.

#### *Huang Xiaoyan (黄小燕)*

A 25-year-old, worked as an assistant in a building material company in Luoyuan Bay and often used the computer during her work time. The Internet jumps to the most frequent used medium with Huang, who spent between half an hour and one hour everyday surfing the Internet. Online chatting was currently the top internet application and an important entertainment source for her. Most of the Olympic news, as a result, was obtained from the Internet by Ms Huang; however, she could not remember and specify any details. Ms Huang chose the newspaper as her favourite media source for the Olympic Games news since she earned her junior college diploma and 'it's convenient to read a newspaper as an assistant'.

#### *A migrant worker L (anonymous)*

Works as a carpenter in Fuzhou Higher Education Mega Center. He did not have and never had used a mobile phone since he did not think it was necessary to have one. However he intended to buy a second-hand mobile phone, mainly to use to contact his family members. Information about the Olympic Games came from his friends, but he could not remember any details or when he received it, because 'it already took me all day time to finish my work and I don't have time to concern myself with the Olympics'.

The majority of migrant workers in our fieldwork seemed to use mobile phones for maintaining family and social relationships. Messages received from migrant workers over the three months of June to August ranged from anxious requests for leave to apologies for missing or being late for work, and messages of seeking work opportunities, to appointments to even dirty jokes.

## Conclusion

During this study, using mobile phones to communicate with others and obtain Olympic Games news was a way of providing connection and up-to-date knowledge on the Olympic Games, where migrant workers were likely to spend fewer hours at home and were also more likely to lead a busy, complex life in which the work, family and social interactions made demands on their time. Migrant workers were managing the rest of their time with the aid of mobile phones and text messaging, being able to manage their lives in the same fashion seems to make sense. Results also show that the mobile phone is essentially an urban medium for communication, because the sharing and requisition of information is relatively small in the villages.

The existence of differences in workplace (rural or urban) areas had the biggest impact on the sampled migrant workers to decide by themselves which media approach would be best to receive the Olympic news in the future. The most frequently used media channel also indicated an impact on both the media approaches about the latest news and future information on Olympic Games. It is interesting that television became the primary source of media used to obtain Olympic Games news, and was also the main media preference and fulfilled audience expectations from migrant workers, but actually this was only slightly significant as the respondents considered mobile phones and the Internet as their second and third sources. *Renmin Daily* cited a migrant worker's feedback as an example, saying that he could receive the latest Olympic news and cheer for the athletes' success through the *People's Mobile Newspaper on Olympic Games*, overcoming difficulties such as the shortage of TV sets in his workplace.<sup>34</sup> We should not omit that interviewees remembered well the exact information they got from mobile phones while they invariably failed to recall the news from the Internet or their friends. Due to the limitation of 160 characters, including letters, spaces and numbers in a text message, as well as the limited screen and size of mobile phones, information left a deeper impression on users. In relation to the average mobile media penetration rate as discussed in previous studies,<sup>35</sup> the sampled migrant workers and their information expectations, we should not ignore the mobile phone's effect on the spread of the Olympic Games influence.

Many modern problems will be resolved through information use and a highly informed public. One of the great promises of mass communication is that it will help alleviate these problems by providing people with the information they need. Mass communication has the potential of reaching people who have not been reached by other means. These people include low-income rural dwelling families as well as the ethnic minority groups in China. Mass communication will also provide vital information to the needy in under-developed countries in the world, many of whom have even less access to the media than those in China. Communication is regarded as a mean of influencing learning motivation.<sup>36</sup> Song and Cornford suggest the government increasingly regards the mobile phone as a channel for information and public services.<sup>37</sup> Technology influences human actions and social structures, and human action and the social context of these actions also shapes technology. Mobile phones will be a relevant approach toward that aim.



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this essay was presented at 'Documenting the Beijing Olympics' conference, organized by the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London, September 12–13, 2008. I wish to thank Dr Kevin Latham and Ms Ding Yimin for their invaluable suggestions on earlier drafts of this essay. I also acknowledge Dr Lola Martinez and Dr Kevin Latham for their editorial assistance in the preparation of this essay. The essay is a product of a research project funded by the Innovation and Technology Fund, Fuzhou University (project no. 2007-XY(S)-06). It's also a product of a research project by the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of China (project no. 2008GH158).
- <sup>2</sup> McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.
- <sup>3</sup> Lax, *Access Denied*, 3.
- <sup>4</sup> Cooper and Kimmelman, *The Digital Divide*; Hoffman and Novak, 'Information Access'; Katz and Aspden, 'Motives, Hurdles, and Dropouts'; McConnaughey and Lader, *Falling through the Net II*.
- <sup>5</sup> CNNIC (China Internet Network Information Center), *Statistical Reports*, 10.
- <sup>6</sup> Calum MacLeod, 'China Vaults Past USA in Internet Users'. *USA TODAY*, April 20 2008, 1.
- <sup>7</sup> Levison, *The Story*; Sieber and Valor Sabatier, 'Uses and Attitudes'.
- <sup>8</sup> CNNIC, *Statistical Reports*.
- <sup>9</sup> Latham, 'SMS, Communication', 303.
- <sup>10</sup> Rice and Katz, 'Comparing Internet'; ITU, 'Asia-Pacific Telecommunication/ICT Indicators 2008 Broadband in Asia-Pacific: Too Much, Too Little?' 2008, 7th ed. <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/publications/asia/2008/index.html>.
- <sup>11</sup> XINHUANET, 'Mobile Phones Become the New Carrier to Spread News in the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games'. August 15, 2008. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/olympics/2008-08/15/content\\_9346917.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/olympics/2008-08/15/content_9346917.htm).
- <sup>12</sup> Zhao, 'Only RMB 0.4 Yuan Each Hour to Watch the Olympic Games via Cell Phone', 7.
- <sup>13</sup> Zhang, 'Survey: The Beijing 2008 Olympic Games will Make a Thorough Face-lift of China's Structure of Wireless Internet Users'. 2008. <http://jeszhang.blog.163.com/blog/static/32112258200871711825865/>.
- <sup>14</sup> EBU (European Broadcasting Union), 'Beijing 2008: The Digital Games'. 2008. [http://www.ebu.ch/en/union/news/2008/tcm\\_6-62839.php](http://www.ebu.ch/en/union/news/2008/tcm_6-62839.php).
- <sup>15</sup> Li, *Urban Migrant Workers*.
- <sup>16</sup> Liu, 'Survey on the Migrant Workers in China', 4.
- <sup>17</sup> Research Office of the State Council, *Report of the Survey*; Wei, *Survey on the Migrant Workers*.
- <sup>18</sup> Xu, 'Report on State Council's "Opinion on How to Resolve Problems Related to Migrant Workers" in 2006', 2.
- <sup>19</sup> Ge, 'Immigration and China's Modernization', 12.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Wang, 'Migrant Workers in New Generation: The Most Noteworthy Social Group', 5; CNNIC, *Statistical Reports*.
- <sup>22</sup> Deng, 'It's Beyond our Expectation that the Average Mobile Phone Penetration Rate in the Migrant Children is Very High', 2.
- <sup>23</sup> Liu, 'Survey on the Migrant Workers in China'; Lai, 'Three Expectations for Migrant Workers in the New Year, Expert Advise to Speed Up the Reform of the Household Registration'. February 18, 2007. [http://news.cnwest.com/content/2007-02/18/content\\_432073.htm](http://news.cnwest.com/content/2007-02/18/content_432073.htm).
- <sup>24</sup> Levinson, *The Story*; Katz and Suygiyama, 'Mobile Phones'.
- <sup>25</sup> Agar, *Constant Touch*; Ling, *The Mobile Connection*; Katz and Aakhus, *Mobile Communication*.
- <sup>26</sup> Leung and Wei, 'Who are the Mobile Phone Have-nots?'.
- <sup>27</sup> Tao Jianjie, 'Media Access', 44–95.
- <sup>28</sup> Yang and Zhu, 'Mobile Phone'.
- <sup>29</sup> Deng Jing, 'It's Beyond our Expectation', 2.
- <sup>30</sup> Liu, 'On Communication'; Xia Qianhua and Ye Xiaohua, 'National Media Coverage'; Xu and Yan, 'An Investigation'.
- <sup>31</sup> CNNIC, *Statistical Reports*; Wang Qinghuan, 'Migrant Workers in New Generation', 5.
- <sup>32</sup> One company in urban and four from rural areas were chosen. They are Fuzhou NANXI Garment Co., LTD (福州市南夕服裝有限公司) in an urban area with 75% migrant workers population; Fuzhou Minlian Wood Industry Limited Company (福州閩聯木業有限公司) with over 70% migrant workers population; Flexible Packaging Science & Technology Garden at Economic Zone on the West Side of the Straits (海峽西岸軟包裝科技園) with 50% migrant workers



population; and Luoyuan Shanlin Food Products Co. Ltd (羅源山林食品) with 51% migrant workers population from rural areas. We also selected migrant workers in Fuzhou Higher Education Mega Center to finish our interviews. The companies in rural areas were all located in the Luoyuan Bay Economic Technical Developing Zone, one of Fujian Province's six over-50,000-ton deep-water port terminal berths. A resource for a further development of the waterfront building, Luoyuan Bay's transportation and air transportation is convenient. It had been identified as Fuzhou's output bay, and the second largest category of commercial bay in Fujian province, opened the air line to Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore and other routes directly.

<sup>33</sup> Interviews with Mr Luo Guoquan (羅國權), director of news centre, Mr Wang Yukun (王宇坤) and Mr He Guidong (何桂東), both operation managers, at the office of Fujian Branch, China Unicom Corporation Limited, July 17, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> *People's Daily Online*, 'People's Mobile Newspaper on Olympic Games had been Well Received by the Readers'. 26 August, 2008. <http://wireless.people.com.cn/GB/113340/113370/7731655.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Wang Qinghuan, 'Migrant Workers in New Generation', 5; Deng Jing, 'It's Beyond our Expectation'.

<sup>36</sup> Horstmanshof, 'Using SMS', 426.

<sup>37</sup> Song and Cornford, 'Mobile Government'.

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